you could bring a book to a date instead of flowers?

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you could bring a book to a date instead of flowers?

by AtticusCrete

Summary

Hannibal, Will, a bookshop, a coffee shop, a surprise gathering,

what can I say in the 'real world' it's New Year's Day and fluff is needed.

Welcome to the Dr Plushy Pants AU where there is humour, tenderness, familiar faces, different deaths (squee), and some angst, corresponding fluff, slow burn, and divergences (Franklyn lives!). Watch for tags for each chapter/part. Canon adjacent. Maybe a second cousin twice removed - some events out of sequence.

It spans beyond the three seasons, and starts with 'a terrible name for a Museum', I've written bits from along the timeline. The ending of the whole series is already written. I'm currently going back to fill in the gaps.

And sorry about the titles, I'm rubbish at titles, and summaries, and notes, *shrugs* in my first four weeks of writing I clocked just under 100,000 words, what can I say? Feedback and friendliness gratefully received. I answer all comments, though it can take me a bit of time.

In real life I'm an archaeologist, and have other things I'm supposed to write and read. But I'm always delighted to hang out here...

Notes

Edited for crap grammar and sentence construction. And not enough biscuits.

'When I was a kid most of my best friends were in books' Will is flipping through an illustrated book on bushcraft by the British author Ray Mears.

Hannibal looks up from the collection of poetry he is considering 'C.S. Lewis is quoted as saying "we read to know we are not alone". Will nods. 'That sounds about right.'

The trip to the bookshop had been Will's idea, Hannibal had suggested coffee in a new Danish bakery he had heard good things about, they're combining the two. Bookshop first, then coffee and if they are as good as they sound, pastries or cake.

'Who were your friends then?'

'Oh, well, don't laugh, but I loved Laura Ingalls, I wanted her to be my sister'

'The Little House books?'

'That's right. They seem to be all about pioneering and daring and how the west was won. But really they're about small things, family, loyalty, dependability. And very much about having enough to eat. That seemed very familiar. I liked her stoicism.'

'Something you could relate to?' 'Probably. We were ok. Not excessive, but ok. But she's happy with small things, like at Christmas, an apple, a tin cup, a pair of red mittens, a shiny penny. In a stocking. It's simple.'

'If you're fishing for me to say you are anything but simple I'm willing to go along with it.'

'No. not really. There are simple bits of me, there's just a lot, and that makes it complex. I find myself very tedious sometimes. It's why I still like books. At least there the words don't shimmer and change and don't get consumed by the words around them.'

Hannibal looks at him, he can see words dancing and pirouetting and struggling to get to the centre of a paragraph, it's an alluring image. If that's how Will feels, it's fascinating, like a kaleidoscope, but no one wants to look through let alone be in a kaleidoscope all the time.

'Do you have many books?'

Hannibal hasn't seen Will's home. He's come close to visiting but on both occasions something has occurred to prevent it. He knows there are dogs, the hair and scent would be a give away, even if he hadn't heard all about Winston. He knows it's moderately remote, they've negotiated over start and finish times for sessions so Will can get to Baltimore or back home in time for the dogs. And drive time if Hannibal were to bring him home from the hospital.

Will laughs 'Yes. A lot. Really. A lot.'

'Surrounded by friends then?'

Will looks at him. 'I do ok you know. Apart from the whole "murder is my business" thing I'm pretty content. I let people in. Most of the time they stay. Maybe you'd be surprised.'

Hannibal is surprised. He'd felt the tug of loneliness the first few times he met Will. He wonders now if he was projecting. Maybe it's him who feels the tug. Towards someone who will know him, see him. And not turn away. Will understand. He looks at Will more carefully, Will is looking at him and smiling.

'You should come and meet my friends then. There are thousands of them.'

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After another twenty minutes Hannibal buys the book of poetry, Will buys six books. He loads them into a cotton book bag. They are about to leave when he darts back and buys another. And grins.

'See? ..books!..You know I live near woods? I love the sound of the trees outside. And the book thing. I'm addicted to the idea of leaves rustling inside the house. They talk to each other when I'm asleep, or not there. They swop ideas and characters and stories. So. They don't get consumed but they can change. Sometimes I think I'll wake up and find David Copperfield talking to Eliza Bennett, or Daniel Boone carrying Huck Finn's paint tin. A vivid imagination can be a good thing, reflecting the best in myself as well as the worst in others. I like stories.'

Hannibal thinks of himself as a man of letters, well read, rounded, thoughtful. He carries his learning lightly, he'd like to think, but he suspects he congratulates himself a little too richly for his erudition. Will though carries his reading and knowing as though it's something to dance with. It's part of his charm. That it can be submerged by the weight of the world is something Hannibal is beginning to regret on his behalf. Why should a child of the light be pushed into the dark? Be constantly punished by it just because he is good at seeing in that dark?

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The cafe is crowded and they end up sharing a table. The woman at the table with the little girl initially looks annoyed at having two men foisted on her. But when they are quiet and read and speak only of small things she unbends a little. Will offers her the additional biscuit he was given with his coffee. She accepts and for a while they speak and discover they know someone in common, the man who owns the bookshop. The little girl makes faces at Hannibal who makes no face in return but turns a flyer left on the table into a frog that will jump if you press it on the back. He makes a second and shows her how to have frog races. She is delighted. The four of them laugh.

When they are left alone Will says 'that was nice of you.'

'And you, with the biscuit.'

'When you have plenty it's easy to share. Come on, you're going to come and visit with my friends. Unless you've got something else you..'

'No, I don't have anything this afternoon or evening (he thinks of a theatre ticket at home) nothing I can't miss.'

'Ok. Will you follow in your car?'

'Why not give me the gps.'

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Hannibal gets into the Bentley and briefly considers what this trip to Will's home is all about. He recognises it as a part of a continuing overture of friendship. But, despite everything that has happened recently he doesn't think it's more than that. Probably. Will was very kind over that business with Hobbs. And he is pretty sure Will likes him. Even without the stalker incident kiss! That business with Stammetts. And he has decided he likes Will. Perhaps too much. But.. he will have to be patient and see what unfolds.

In his own car Will dumps the book bag on the front seat beside him. He hums to himself. He's really done it now. He has a moment of trying to remember how untidy the living room is likely to be. The kitchen. God has he got anything he can feed Hannibal with. And he will have to hide some of Bev's 'food'. He can detour to a market on the way home and there's some fish, there's always fish. He puts on some music, Mozart's 'Magic Flute', and sings loudly all the way home.

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He gets there first, just. Hannibal pulls in besides his car. There are already two cars parked in the driveway.

'Are you expecting anyone? Should I go..?'

'No, no, of course not. That's Jimmys car but I don't know the other one. Let's find out.' Will grabs his bags and shifts one of them into Hannibal's offering hand. 'Thanks.'

As they approach the porch they find Jimmy and Bev with Brian and one of the interns from the lab, she's looking embarrassed like they made her come. They've got blankets and cushions and are sitting in a little line on the bench outside the back door.

'God Will why can't you hide your key under a flowerpot like any normal person would.'

'How long have you been here?'

'Ages and ages!'

'Oh dear. Well that's a shame. I thoroughly recommend telling me next time.'

'Yeah well, we sort of thought you'd be here. After yesterday and everything. Oh and sorry, and, glad you're ok. And, sorry, hello Hannibal.' He smiles at them. He's graduated to Hannibal, at least outside the office.

'You're working up to telling me why you're here aren't you' Will nods at them like they're fourth graders

'oh yeah we brought food, well the makings of food, we brought fireworks too, and stuff for a fire. None of us have a yard. Pleeeeease Will.'

'Sure, why not,' he glances at Hannibal this isn't quite what he'd had in mind, but well, maybe he was getting ahead of himself, he really likes this man, 'the grown ups are taking this lot inside and then we'll work out what we're doing next ok?'

'Yes Uncle Will' Will side eyes Jimmy who has the grace to blush slightly. The little intern hops to attention and carries supplies in following Brian into the kitchen and back out, clear that they've both been here before

When they go into the living room Hannibal is taken a back. 'You do indeed have thousands of friends!'

Will smiles very happily. 'I know you've got two libraries worth but I've given away as many as I've got here, oh and all the rooms upstairs have books too. I had to get the joists strengthened.'

Hannibal is already looking at the titles. His head turned to one side. In part he wonders if and where his and Will's tastes will overlap, in part he is just absorbing this new facet of Will's life. That and the dogs. Milling around happily now there are lots of two-legs to play with.

'Come into the kitchen we can have a think about food. Now that we have four chicks to feed.' He blushes slightly at the possible implications of what he's just said. Hannibal smiles blandly back, charmed by the heat he sees in Will's cheeks. They go into the kitchen and empty all the bags onto the counters, Will opens the fridge and pulls out various things from inside. Hannibal takes stock of what's available. A decent range of herbs and spices, condiments, oils, carbohydrates, proteins, starches and plenty of vegetables. Not impossible at all. He opens a cupboard at head height and finds flours, sugar and other dry goods.

'Did you really not know they were coming?'

'No, but it's not unusual. Even though we all went out last night.

'I was under the impression that your acquaintance with the team was relatively recent.'

'Have you met Beverly?'

Hannibal laughs. 'Yes indeed. She has inserted herself into your life and tied you all into a big bow.'

Will smiles easily at that 'yeah. I did tell you I let people in, if they ask, and they usually stay'

'should I ask?'

'Definitely'

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They light a fire and pull chairs and rugs outside, there's a table left over from the summer before so they stick a table cloth (Will Graham owns a tablecloth) over it. Will finds some storm lanterns so they light those too. It's not fully dark. There's a slight chill so Will shares out coats and scarves. Wrapped up they eat and laugh. They play charades in the dark the dogs barking at Zeller every time he gets a turn. They tell campfire stories. Quite late they sing the kind of things you learn in Boy or Girl Scouts. There are small fireworks and sparklers.

Hannibal hasn't taken part in something like this maybe since he was a child himself. Before his parents died. His solemnity stems from then. But this evening he laughs. He gets hit by a carefully aimed grape and then makes everyone laugh by throwing it impossibly high and catching it in his mouth. He graciously accepts the applause. He has the impression that if there was snow they'd build snow forts and snow people and make snow angels. Or in the summer there would be water fights. And a barbecue.

This isn't what he'd been expecting at this stage in his life. There are things about him, dark things best left in the night, closed in locked rooms, silenced, that don't belong here with these laughing people. But what does he know of their sorrows and deeps, what are they drawing behind them. He might not be the only one here carrying tragedy like a lantern, illuminating every encounter.

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As the evening winds down Beverly and Will are washing dishes.

'You brought him here then?'

'Yes.'

'sorry if we interrupted?'

'Not really, it was a spur of the moment thing. I'm glad you're here. It's nice. This is nice. It was good last night. It's good for us to have time together which isn't shit.'

'To help us when it is?'

'For sure.'

'Do you have a bad feeling?'

' I always have a bad feeling, it's just it sometimes gets overlaid by good feelings' he smiles at her

Bev leans on Will and rests her chin on his shoulder 'thanks bro, I love you too' she leans up and kisses Will on the cheek.

Will for all his humour and wry warmth is almost never touched. For an adult, especially men, no children, no spouse, no intimate partner, no close relatives, no parent nearby, there is

no one in his life to touch him, especially with warm affection, it's almost unbearable in what it tears at inside. He gives an involuntary shudder. Bev instantly knows something has happened and she pulls him round to her to hug properly, arms thrown round him caging him, his hands over his eyes. Trying not to cry.

Hannibal comes into the kitchen carrying the last of the plates, seeing them he almost backs out of the door, but it's Beverly who is facing him and she beckons him in. He puts down the plates. Somehow with grace and kindness she passes Will to Hannibal who wraps him up and holds him as Will finally let's himself cry. The last few weeks coming to a head. Shooting Hobbs, being kidnapped, the murder and mayhem, the sleepwalking. And disappointment of a kind he is barely willing to acknowledge. Beverly doesn't leave them. Acts as though it's normal for her friend to cry and for this other friend to hug him.

She looks at Hannibal 'we have a shit job sometimes', he can only nod.

She puts the kettle on and by the time it's boiled and she can make coffee and chocolate Will is calming down. Hannibal still stands with an arm around him, Will still leans into him but he's recovering.

'I've got biscuits, I'll find them' he stands up straighter and shakes his head just once. Breathes. And then turns back to Hannibal, smiles, slightly shakily and then kisses him on the cheek. He turns to another cupboard and finds the biscuit barrel. Chocolate Bath Olivers and Amaretti. The three of them take the drinks and biscuits outside.

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In the dark, no one can see you cried. The candles are guttering. They drink coffee and chocolate or half and half, Jimmy produces a hip flask with brandy in it. Hannibal shows them how to roll and light the papers the amaretti are wrapped in so they will carry up into the sky like fire flies. They are all quieter now. Full. The little intern is nearly asleep. It turns out it was her birthday and that's why they all came. Zeller and Jimmy barely got home before they turned round and came out again, just time to change, now dressed for Wolf Trap at least.

Mugs are brought inside, chairs returned to the porch and living room, the table cloth shaken out, napkins into a laundry basket, cushions and rugs redistributed around, the science team split into the two cars and set off with thanks and see yous and sass. Will and Hannibal take the dogs for a last walk across the fields. At the far edge of the property, at the beginning of the woods it's possible to look back and see through the gathering mist, the house lit up, as a boat floating at anchor. Safe.

'It is your security?' Hannibal asks.

'A boat is safe at anchor, but that's not what a boat is for' pensive, Will looks at him 'so, yes, it's safe, but I can't stay there.'

'Not even for a little while?'

'Sometimes.'

They walk back towards the house, closer to, Hannibal stops and when Will pauses and looks at him questioningly Hannibal pulls him closer and kisses him. Just a simple warm press of lips, a small slide against one another, the slightest parting of their mouths. Promising. They pull back, smiling.

'That was me asking'

'you're very welcome'.

Back at the car. They smile easily at each other.

'Thank you for a very memorable day, well, 24 hours',

Will is trying to think of something appropriate to say but he's got stuck on the memory and feel of the kiss.

'Oh, and I bought you a book' Hannibal hands Will the book he bought earlier, 'a friend to keep you company when I'm gone?'

'I like the idea that instead of bringing flowers to a date you brought a book'

'was it a date then?'

Will looks down at his shoes, 'Shall we find out next time?'

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